

Dear Sue,

Thank you for taking the time to review all of the letters written in response to the Rubicon trail. I am sure you have received both letters of support as well as some 'negative' letters with no context. In the end water quality is of the utmost importance and no minor issue should ever be overlooked. Not only should the Rubicon trail be closed, but also several other sierra roadways. I am extremely concerned that there is significant sedimentation of the American river due to hwy 50 running along it, the Yuba river due to hwy 80 running along it, and massive amounts of sedimentation being dumped into lake Tahoe due to the roadways which run around the lake (hwy. 89, 50, etc..). Although the Rubicon may have 8-10 dump trucks worth of dust sediment which have accumulated, it is no where as serious as the major problem of the thousands upon thousands of Caltrans trucks which dump thousands upon thousands yards of sand per winter over the sierra highways. This sand is then blasted by snow plows and snow blowers off the highway and into the delicate Sierra Nevada environment damaging adjacent plant material and always finding its way into the adjacent water bodies.

The amount of pollution discharged into the adjacent streams is also a serious concern. The Eldorado County traffic count mentions a yearly total of 35,000 vehicles with a period of extreme usage occurring over the July 4th holiday w/ 372 vehicles. This number is far from valid since the trail usage could be divided into several different catagories. The winter use of the trail which occurs from November thru April is extremely low with usage maybe approaching 200 vehicle users over a 6month period. It just is not feasible for trucks and jeeps to navigate a 10'-20' snowpack. From an environmental point it is beneficial that the thick snowpack does protect the environment during the mid winter months. In regards to the remaining 6 months of usage along the Rubicon Trail, most visits occur every weekend. Even taking the July 4th high attendance of 372 vehicles times 6 months times 4 weekends each results in a vehicle traffic total of only 8,928. The first flush treatment for these vehicles along the Rubicon Trail takes place in the granite environment, which offers a huge natural rock/ gravel filter for the small pollutant load missed by cleanup efforts, to be treated by natural bacteria found in the rock/ gravel. The watersheds along the Rubicon are also slow moving allowing for plant material to biofilter out any additional contaminants. The low number of users along the Rubicon fails in comparison to the hundreds of thousands of cars which travel the sierra highways dripping oil, differential fluid, and coolant on the roadway. These sierra highways all have fast moving bodies of water (Yuba River and American river) and minimal treatment zone between the highway and the ultimate points of concern (Lake Tahoe Clarity). The yearly 'first flush' winter rains discharge this extremely high pollutant load into the Yuba river, American river, and Lake Tahoe. This load is thousands of times more toxic than the discharge found on the Rubicon trail (basic common sense tells me so), hence a more serious problem than the Rubicon Trail.

The summer impact of tourists, backpackers, day hikers, fishermen, equestrians, etc... is also of concern. The number of daily day hikers at echo lake trail head who hike back to the Lake Aloha area is a perfect example of extreme overuse. During the summer months, the high amount of users fight over the minimal number of parking spots around the Echo lake staging area, parking far off the road, on bushes, and parking under trees

compacting the sensitive tree root zone. In the desolation wilderness areas, no bathroom facilities are present to accommodate the hundreds of daily day hikers found there every weekend. This issue does not simply exist only at Echo lakes, but at many other points of interest within the Sierra Nevada. Where as the Rubicon has a localized sanitation issue at Spider Lake due to concentrated use, this again is a very small problem when compared to the hundreds of day hikers using trail heads around the entire lake Tahoe region. Since most of these hikers/ backpackers find it appalling to actually bag their own fecal mater in a zip lock bag and carry it back to the staging areas in their backpack. On the contrary a growing number of 4x4 enthusiasts actually do utilize WAG bag systems and pack everything out in their vehicles. In the past fecal contamination of water was an issue in highly used areas such as Spider Lake on the Rubicon. Although the science showed an issue it was always speculated why not one single person has become ill at Spider Lake.

Every summer weekend thousands of desired camping areas are taken often placed within feet of a body of water. It is easily seen that the 100' camping setback from a stream/ body of water taught in boy scouts is often ignored by backpackers and other backcountry users. This often leads to cooking and cleaning in the adjacent waters polluting them with food scraps, soap, and toiletries. The opposite is true for 4x4 users on the Rubicon who have been mandated to stay within 10' of the trail with their vehicle. The vast majority of these 4x4 users camp next to their vehicles, far from any water source. Since these Rubicon users have supplies such as water with them, the tasks of cleaning and polluting streams is minimal since these tasks are often done adjacent to the trail, far from any water body. It is also of great benefit that the first flush of winter rains do take place in the sierra Nevada, offering a huge rock/ gravel watershed for the small pollutant load missed by cleanup efforts, to be treated by natural bacteria found in the rock/ gravel. The watersheds along the Rubicon are also slow moving allowing for plant material to biofilter out any additional contaminants. Unlike the sierra highways which all have fast moving bodies of water (Yuba river and American river) and minimal treatment zone between the highway and the ultimate points of concern (Lake Tahoe Clarity), the Rubicon is far better off.

As in summer, similar issues are also present in the population of winter users. There is a very small user group of 4x4 enthusiasts who are brave enough to tackle the sierra snowpack in properly equipped vehicles. However, I would one again like to point out that the number of 4x4's that enter the Rubicon during the winter months is easily under 200 user days per winter and is nothing compared to the number of backcountry skiers, cross country skiers, telemark skiers, and snowshoe user groups who use all areas around the Lake Tahoe area with a population thousands of times that of the 4x4 community. In a similar manner to the summer overuse and fecal contamination of bodies of water, the winter users have left waste in places such as Carson pass, echo lakes, donner pass, etc...

Once again, I do not think you are doing enough and should not stop at closing the Rubicon. The amount of sedimentation in the sierra Nevada due to the sanding and winterization of all the sierra highways, the roadway pollution from the millions of vehicles which travel the sierra Nevada/ Tahoe region every year, the water quality and

fecal impact by the thousands upon thousands of day hikers, backpackers, wandering tourists, boats, water skiers, fisherman, skiers, bikers, kayakers, rafters, etc... who use the Tahoe areas overshadows the negligible amount of pollution and sedimentation found on the Rubicon 4x4 trail. If only all other users became as educated as the 4x4 groups and carried their fecal matter off the trail, cleaned up oil spills every time there was an issue with 'clean up kits' given away / or purchased, did not camp next to bodies of water, poured thousands of man hours in every year to cleanup the trail, rebuild parts of the trail, the water quality of the Tahoe region may be a better place. But until that time comes the impact of other significant sierra highways and user groups is serious impact of paramount importance and the roadways and trails must be closed.

sincerely,

-Charles Gardella